

# **Announcing RITAM**

## **(Research Initiative on Traditional Antimalarial Methods)**

### **Introduction**

Malaria is recognised as one of the key priorities for the World Health Organisation. The programme of research that was drafted from the initial meetings on malaria in Dakar, Senegal, in 1997 included research into herbal antimalarials.

However, while research has progressed in other areas of malaria control, research into herbal antimalarials has not yielded many - if any - results that can be implemented by malaria control programmes. Discussion of this topic has been notably absent from international meetings on malaria, including the recent MIM African Malaria Conference in Durban, despite the fact that there were several researchers present who are working in this field. A proposal that was made at the Symposium on "Plants as Medicines" at the European Congress on Tropical Medicine in Liverpool in September 1998 was raised again in Durban and it was agreed that the Global Initiative for Traditional Systems of Health (GIFTS) would take the initial steps to establish a network of researchers interested in herbal antimalarials. This has been agreed to as part of a formal collaboration between GIFTS and WHO's Tropical Disease Research (TDR) division. The network will be a component of the new research initiative to be known as the Research Initiative on Traditional Anti-Malarials (RITAM).

### **Who will participate in RITAM?**

RITAM is a collaboration between the WHO, the Global Initiative For Traditional Systems of Health (GIFTS), University of Oxford, and researchers and others throughout the world. It is for those who are investigating, or are interested in, the anti-malarial properties of plants, with a view to developing or validating local herbal medicines to prevent and/or treat malaria.

Membership of RITAM is free. Communications will be in English.

Researchers who volunteered their names at the Durban and Moshi meetings, and others known to be interested in this field, have been contacted, and invited to send in their name, contact details, and names of any colleagues who might also be interested in participating.

### **Aims of RITAM**

1. To establish and strengthen links between researchers interested in research on herbal antimalarials, in different countries and institutions.
2. To catalogue and review current knowledge on herbal antimalarials.
3. To share new ideas and discoveries on herbal antimalarials.
4. To determine research priorities, and avoid replication of research.
5. To make an important global contribution to the control of malaria, through the use of herbal anti-malarials.

## How will RITAM achieve these aims?

**1. Contact List:** Members are invited to provide a short synopsis of their work and interests, for circulation to other members, to facilitate contact and partnerships between researchers with similar interests. Regional and national networks are being developed in some areas.

**2. Database:** Members are invited to send in copies of any published or unpublished work on herbal remedies for malaria, to create a central database, which all can use and access readily, perhaps via the internet. Sections of the database will include:

- a) treatment seeking and ethnomedical studies
- b) ethnobotanical studies
- c) pharmacological studies
- d) clinical case reports and studies

This database could lead to overviews of the current research, identifying new research priorities, and avoiding replication of work.

**3. Newsletter:** Members will be invited to contribute informal pieces for an electronic newsletter. Articles should discuss research priorities; methodology; strengthening research links and research capacity; and implications of current research results. Members are encouraged to respond using the newsletter's correspondence section. Publications of original research will be limited to a list of abstracts of recently published (and unpublished) work on herbal antimalarials, to inform members about the latest research, and where to find it.

**4. Meetings:** RITAM held its first international meeting in collaboration with the WHO to discuss appropriate research targets and methods on herbal antimalarials. This took place in Moshi, Tanzania, on 8-11 December 1999. A meeting on natural products chemistry will be held in Geneva in spring 2000. A special session focussing on Latin American research is also being developed for the World Congress on Tropical Medicine to be held in Cartagena, in Colombia, in August 2000.

### **5. Specialist Groups**

At the Moshi meeting, it was decided to continue discussions through electronic networks of members with special interests. These will set themselves their own targets, for example to develop Standard Operational Procedures for different research areas.

The groups are:

- a) Policy, Advocacy and Funding
- b) Preclinical Studies
- c) Clinical Development
- d) Insect Repellants, Vector Control and other Measures

# **How to join RITAM?**

*Simply fill out this questionnaire and return it, via e-mail or post, to:*

Dr Gerry Bodeker and Dr Merlin L Willcox

e-mail: [merlinwillcox@hotmail.com](mailto:merlinwillcox@hotmail.com)

Postal Address: GIFTS of Health, Green College, University of Oxford, Oxford OX2 6HG, UK.

## **1. Your Contact Details:**

Full Name and Title:

Position:

Postal Address:

E-mail address:

Telephone:

Fax:

## **2. The Contact List:**

Would you be willing for your details to be added to the list of contacts, for circulation to other members? YES / NO

*If yes, please supply the following information about yourself, as briefly as possible:*

- a) The Present: What is your current post and work?
- b) The Past: What research have you conducted on herbal antimalarials?
- c) The Future: What can you contribute to future research projects on herbal antimalarials? Do you hope to do any further research in this area yourself?

## **3. Specialist Groups:**

Would you like to participate in the e-mail discussions of one or more of the specialist groups? Please tick the relevant group below:

- a) Policy, advocacy and funding
- b) Preclinical studies
- c) Clinical development
- d) Insect repellants, vector control and other measures

## **4. The Database:**

**Your Work:** *please list any studies you have done on herbal antimalarials:*

a) **Published work:** *(please supply full reference, and if possible, please send a copy of the full paper).*

b) **Unpublished work:** *(please send a copy of each report).*

**Other Work:** *Please also supply details of any other studies on herbal antimalarials which you know about (especially unpublished, or published in journals which are not listed on international databases, or published in languages other than English).*

## **Foreign Language Publications:**

Would you be willing to volunteer as a translator for work not published in English or French? YES/NO

*If yes, please specify the language:*

## **5. The Newsletter:**

What issues would you like to see discussed in the Newsletter?

Would you like to write a piece for the Newsletter? YES/NO

*If yes, please specify what you would like to write about:*

## **6. Meetings:**

Would you be interested in attending a future meeting of RITAM (NB: members will probably have to find their own funding)? YES / NO

Would you like to make a presentation at a future meeting of RITAM?

*If yes, please send an abstract.*

## **7. New Members:**

If you know anyone else who may be interested in joining RITAM, please give us their e-mail address or contact details below.